

**LESSONS FROM AN INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION:
A FACULTY MEMBER'S REFLECTIONS**

**Autumn Tooms
Kent State University**

My experiences, both researcher and primary administrator of the Bahamian cohort, led to a reflection on the lessons learned from embarking on this kind of international collaboration. The most obvious caveat, for those interested in such work, centers on faculty capacity. While the Educational Administration program at Kent State University included many faculty members who had the heartfelt desire to contribute to the noble efforts of our Bahamian colleagues, the majority of professors who taught in Nassau began this endeavor in their third year of their employment at the university. Any classes taught for this program were an addition to the required 9-hour/semester faculty course load. Thus, the stress of balancing four graduate courses with writing responsibilities was palpable for all faculty involved in the program. The primary lesson is that, before embarking on an endeavor such as this, discussions should be held with program members and administration that focus on faculty capacity, the goals of untenured faculty, and the demands of an international collaboration.

I was the initial architect of the proposal and named as program coordinator. I also had no course release for the administrative work of coordinating the program. After several conversations with a senior faculty mentor, a meeting took place between the Dean of the College of Education, Health, and Human Services at Kent State University, faculty involved in the cohort, and various other college administrators. We all discussed faculty capacity, the partnership goals, and the pressure to earn tenure and promotion and the conversation resulted in the redistribution of cohort duties, such as scheduling, budget, and paperwork. This shift

in responsibilities allowed me to focus more time on teaching at both the Kent and Nassau campuses. Additionally, this event empowered other junior colleagues within the department to voice their concerns about balance during their quest for tenure.

One of the most successful investments of this effort was the time spent teaching faculty members about Bahamian culture and rituals before they began their classes in Nassau. Faculty members were able to visit Bahamian schools, talk to colleagues who had been to Nassau, and learn about the culture, with the hope that the experiences would play out in a greater sense of connection between professor and student.

In terms of cultural exchange, faculty made a point to listen to the students. This single effort was truly the key in providing a deeper and more meaningful experience for both faculty and students. For example, Kent State University faculty initially believed that the students should have a museum tour or some other cultural experience beyond the coursework. Group discussions with members of the cohort revealed that the students had a significant interest in visiting an outlet mall. Because The Bahamas is an island, shopping for mundane items such as clothing, school supplies, and computer equipment is an expensive experience with very little variety. None of the Kent State University faculty members had considered this *True-True Bahamian* view. When the cultural significance of shopping was explained and interpreted for the administration at Kent State University, all were happy to oblige the graduate students. A new effort was made to modify the summer school prospectus so visiting students could visit suburban and urban schools, the Cleveland Art Museum, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and the Grove City Outlet Mall.

On the day of commencement in Nassau, a newly minted graduate mentioned that her fondest memory of the entire cohort experience was being able to visit with students in a Youngstown high school and on the same day buy 15 pairs of Nike shoes in Grove City. Perhaps her affectionate recollection is where the success of an

international cohort rests - in finding ways to engage both students and faculty in cultural as well as intellectual exchange.